

Report for 2016 Wayland Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber Committee continues to meet each month and the last year financially supported the Senior Citizens Christmas Party, Watton Carnival, Watton Job Fair, Watton Radio and the Wayland Promotional Brochure.

We were without a Chair or Vice-Chair for the whole of the year from Feb 2016-7. However, at our recent AGM we were able to appoint a Vice Chair and welcome several new members to the event which was held at Broom Hall.

We now have 156 members. The perceived idea is that most businesses see the Chamber purely as the directory rather than a voice and a meeting point for the whole business community.

Throughout the year we continued to update our members with information relevant to local business, maintained the Chamber website on which each member has a page and published and delivered 9500 copies of the 34th annual Wayland Information, Trade and Services Directory which is still well used by local residents and businesses. The Chamber also monitors local planning applications of relevance to the locality.

One of the most popular events last year was our EU in or out debate lunch on May 6th which was attended by George Freeman. It was a lively and interesting debate with the end vote coming down in favour of staying in Europe!

This year it has generally been quite difficult to engage with businesses – both in terms of getting them to attend meetings and to participate in initiatives in the town but the committee is working hard to try and rectify this – especially in the light of recent business closures in the high street.

An example of this is the Wayland Academy Education and Business Breakfast on 28th April 2017. Breckland Council reports that there has been very poor take-up for this event. The chamber has tried hard to promote this event through it's newsletters to members regarding this event.

Our 35th annual Wayland Information, Trade and Services Directory has just been printed and the 9500 copies are now being distributed across the Wayland area.

Future events for this year include:

- Participation in the Engaging Communities Open Day at Queens Hall Sat 20th May 2017 10am to 2pm .
- Giving prizes Wayland Academy Assembly on Wednesday 17th May.
- Financial sponsorship for Blossom and Yarn.

- Business Showcase Event Tuesday 13th September 2017. Currently only 3 businesses have signed up but it is early days yet. We have asked FSB to fund refreshments and are waiting to hear their response.
- Small Business Saturday 25th November. We are working on ways to make this more attractive to businesses in the town and to make it far more visible through the use of banners etc. Again we are in the early stages with this at the moment but we are hoping to make this a popular event in the run up to Christmas.
- Our Christmas Window Competition will run as usual and this year the theme will be Christmas Trees.
- Breckland Council have recently funded a jobs fair which was very popular. Ideally they would like to see 2 a year but can only fund one. The chamber is exploring the possibility of running an event with the Wayland Partnership which is currently being costed.

Plans for the future

At our last meeting the committee agreed that there is still great scope to increase both the profile of the Wayland Chamber as a voice for business people and to help our members with their businesses. In the coming months we are looking to substantially increase our profile by:

- Developing the Chamber blog to include local business case studies, business tips, relevant business news items etc
- Linking the above to a much more proactive social media campaign across Twitter and Facebook
- Looking to revamp the website with a more dynamic directory that contains more information on businesses and enables businesses to do things like offer discounts, vouchers, promotions etc
- Setting up a series of bite-sized business workshops (in conjunction with members/partners) in areas such as marketing, blogging, social media, accounting tips, law, etc

Like many organisations at the moment we are suffering from low engagement and apathy. We hope that these plans will help to revitalise the Chamber as a voice for the business people of Wayland and in turn help them develop their businesses and prosper in these difficult times.